



SPECIFICATION

CONVECTION/IMPINGEMENT OVEN FOR CONTINUOUSLY COOKING FOOD

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

A' 1 The field of the invention is cooking ovens and the invention relates more
2 particularly to ovens of the type used to commercially bake, broil or otherwise cook
3 meats, baked goods and other foods. With the increased use of frozen dinners, the
4 moisture content in the meat contained in a frozen dinner has become more critical.
5 Since microwave cooking tends to heat water, it is important that sufficient water be
6 retained in the meat so that after it is microwaved it has the desired flavor and texture.

7 Many patents have been granted on continuous cooking ovens. For instance the
8 Straub patent no. 3,604,336 shows a moving belt with upper and lower burners, a center
9 exhaust duct is provided and no provision is made for moisture control of the finished
10 product.

11 The Szabrak et al patent no. 3,721,178 also uses many burners along the length of
12 the oven. The Nerthling patent no. 3,823,660 utilizes a continuous moving belt with
13 radiant heaters above and below the food to be cooked. Burners are also used and the
14 exhaust vent is positioned along one side of the entire length of the oven.

15 The Fagerstrom et al patent shows an electrical heating device over which air is
16 passed after which it passes through channels above and below the product to be cooked.
17 The cooking vapors are vented at points along the oven. The Caridis et al patent no.
18 3,947,241 shows a recirculating oven wherein a flame is fed into an upper chamber and

1 then passes in a u-shaped path into the lower chamber where the product to be cooked is
2 located. A certain amount of cooking vapors is exhausted at both ends of the oven.

3 A charmaker is shown in the Fetzer patent no. 4,026,201 which uses many rings
4 which are heated and ride on the upper surface of the food product. The Baker et al
5 patent no. 4,121,509 utilizes electric heating elements and recirculated air which passes
6 through tubes at the end of the oven and flows against the upper and lower surface of the
7 food to be cooked.

8 The Caridis et al patent no. 4,167,585 is similar in structure to patent no.
9 3,947,241 and is basically a recirculation system wherein water vapor is injected into the
10 moving stream of process vapor to control the temperature and moisture content.

11 The Benson et al patent no. 4,297,942 shows a branding process utilizing an
12 oversized screen with upper and lower burners, the heat from which it is exhausted from
13 the branding unit. The Baker patent no. 4,936,286 is a small continuous broiler which
14 has three side-by-side conveyors. The Leary et al patent no. 4,949,629 is a continuous
15 cooking oven which has two very separate cooking zones, both zones utilize recirculation
16 of the cooking vapors. Lastly, the Barkhau et al patent no. 4,991,497 cooks food in a
17 closed bottom tray and utilizes air high velocity impingement nozzles to accomplish the
18 cooking. The air is recirculated.

19 Although one would think that recirculation of cooking vapor would result in an
20 efficient unit, this is not the case. Since ovens must be constructed in a manner so that
21 they can be easily and completely cleaned, it is not practical to place an outer layer of
22 insulation on the oven. Therefore, the large additional surface area that is required to
23 bring about recirculation radiates more than the amount of heat saved in recirculation.
24 Furthermore, for some products such as pork, the recirculation process results in an
25 undesirable pink color in the meat even though it is completely cooked. Therefore, an

1 oven which is more efficient in the use of heat would be highly desirable. Still further, it
2 is useful to be able to cook various different types of food products requiring a wide
3 range of controls for heat temperature and humidity.
4

5 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

6 The present invention is for an improved convection/impingement oven for
7 continuously cooking food. The oven is of the type having a pervious, continuous,
8 moving belt which has an upper product supporting surface referred to as a "food
9 supporting belt" and a return belt portion. The food supporting belt has a lower surface
10 which permits the passage of hot air or other vapors upwardly therethrough and the
11 passage of fat or other drippings downwardly therethrough. The food passes from a
12 product feed end to a product discharge end through a closed elongated cooking chamber
13 which is enclosed by a top, two sides, and a bottom. The food supporting belt and the
14 return belt both pass through this chamber. A burner blower is supplied with outside air
15 and feeds air to at least one burner which feeds hot air to a first manifold which is at
16 about atmospheric pressure and has an air intake which permits atmospheric air to enter
17 from outside the oven. A second blower then takes the atmospheric pressure hot air and
18 increases the pressure thereof for later feeding into a low pressure, hot-air manifold and
19 from there through air impingement nozzles onto the food to be cooked. A plurality of
20 upper air impingement nozzles are positioned above the food supporting belt and these
21 nozzles are fed from an upper air impingement manifold which in turn is supplied from
22 the said low pressure hot air manifold. A plurality of lower air impingement nozzles are
23 positioned below the lower surface of the food supporting belt, and this is fed from a
24 lower air impingement manifold which in turn is fed by the low pressure hot air
25 manifold. Means are provided for independently controlling the flow of hot air to the

1 upper air impingement manifold and to the lower air impingement manifold. A cooking
2 vapor vent having an inlet positioned adjacent the product discharge of the cooking
3 chamber comprises the only outlet for the cooking vapors. The cooking vapors move
4 along the cooking chamber and hot air is introduced along the length of the chamber
5 thereby causing the hot air flow, concurrently with the food-supporting surface, to move
6 at an ever increasing rate along the cooking oven. Preferably the lower hot air
7 impingement units and the upper hot air impingement units are fed by separate burners
8 and blowers. Also preferably a color development and sealing unit is positioned at the
9 product feed end of the cooking chamber and upper and lower burners are played upon
10 the food to be cooked (and preferably a branding wheel) and the heat from these two
11 burners is passed the entire length of the cooking chamber. The color development and
12 sealing burners are adjustable so that the direction of the flame may made from horizontal
13 to directly downwardly. It is also preferable that a plurality of steam nozzle assemblies
14 are positioned along the cooking chamber, preferably between the impingement units.
15 Also, preferably the steam nozzles are separated into several discreet groups which are
16 independently controllable so that different zones of the oven can be of different humidity
17 and/or temperature.

18 The present invention is also for a process of cooking food comprising the steps of
19 placing an object to be cooked on the upper surface of a perforate moving belt. Next, a
20 color development and sealing flame is aimed so that the heat therefrom passes into the
21 entrance of an elongated cooking chamber. Steam may next be introduced above and
22 below the object to be cooked and hot air is impinged on the upper and lower surface
23 with the temperature and force of the impinging stream of hot air from the upper nozzles
24 being independently controlled from that from the lower nozzles. The object to be
25 cooked is passed through at least one set of upper and lower air impingement nozzles and

upper and lower steam nozzles and the finally cooked product is removed at the product discharge end.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a plan view of the improved convection/impingement cooking oven of the present invention.

~~Fig. 1A is an enlarged plan view of the impingement console unit of Fig. 1.~~

Figure 2 is a cross sectional view taken along line 2-2 of Fig. 1.

Fig. 3 is an enlarged cross sectional view of the product feed end of the oven of Fig. 1 including the color development and sealing assembly, a steam nozzle assembly, and a hot air impingement assembly.

Fig 3A is an enlarged view taken along line 3A of Fig. 3.

Fig. 4 is a cross sectional view taken along line 4-4 of Fig. 3.

Fig. 5 is an enlarged cross sectional view of the product discharge end of the oven of Fig. 1.

Fig. 6 is a cross sectional end view showing the oven of Fig. 1 with the hood thereof raised.

Fig. 7 is a front view of the control panel of the cooking unit of Fig. 1.

Fig. 8 is a diagrammatic view of the control panel of Fig. 7.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

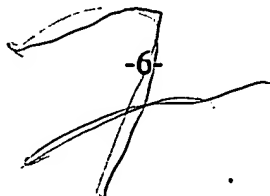
The improved convection/impingement oven of the present invention is shown in Figs. 1 and 2 and indicated by reference character 10. Oven 10 has a product feed end 11 and a product discharge end 12. The food to be cooked is placed on a pervious, continuous, moving belt 13 which is fabricated from a plurality of linked rods, of steel or other construction known in the art. The unit is operated from a control counsel 14, and

1 an impingement console 15 contains the burners for feeding the air impingement unit.

2 Details of the impingement console are shown in Fig. ~~1A~~ ⁹

3 *C* A cross sectional view of oven 10 is shown in Fig. 2 where it can be seen that the
4 upper part of belt 13 moves from left to right as shown in Fig. 2 and passes through an
5 elongated cooking chamber which is shown more clearly in Figs. 3 and 4, where it is
6 indicated by reference character 16. As the food to be cooked passes along the forward
7 moving portion 17 of the belt 13, (the forward moving portion 17 is called the "food
8 supporting belt") upper and lower air impingement nozzles such as those indicated in Fig.
9 2 by reference characters 18 and 19 pass hot air onto the upper and lower surface of the
10 product to be cooked. Also, steam nozzles assemblies such as indicated in Fig. 2 by
11 reference characters 62, 70, and 73 pass steam or water vapor into the cooking vapor 21
12 which forms above and below the food to be cooked.

13 The essential feature of the present invention is the ability to separately control
14 both the temperature and volume emitted from the upper and lower air impingement
15 nozzles in the oven. As shown in Fig. ~~1A~~, a blower assembly 22 feeds air ~~23~~ and fuel
16 ~~23'~~ to a burner nozzle 25. Burner nozzle 25 forms a flame which heats the air in the
17 interior of manifold 27. The interior of manifold 27 is at about atmospheric pressure and
18 draws air ~~24~~ as needed through conduit 24 which is open to the exterior of the oven.
19 Conduit 24 does not draw any recirculated hot air from vent 83. Similarly, a blower
20 assembly ~~122~~ feeds air ~~123~~ and fuel ~~123'~~ to a burner nozzle ~~125~~. Burner nozzle ~~125~~
21 forms a flame which heats the air in manifold ~~127~~. The hot air in manifold ~~127~~ is at
22 about atmospheric pressure and draws air ~~124~~ as needed through conduit ~~124~~ which also
23 *C* is drawn from outside the oven. The hot air at atmospheric pressure in manifold 27 is
24 fed to a blower assembly 29 which increases its pressure to from one-half to ten psig.
25 As blower assembly 29 requires more hot air, above that required to simply move the



gasses exiting nozzle 25, it is supplied by the air stream ~~24~~²⁸ entering conduit 24 so it never has a negative feed pressure. Blower assembly 29 feeds the hot air into a hot air conduit 31 from which it passes into the upper hot air manifold 32 shown in Figs. 3, 5, and 6. Blower assembly ~~129~~³⁰ feeds hot air from manifold ~~127~~²⁸ to lower hot air conduit 33 (which is directly below conduit 31 in Fig. ~~1A~~⁹) from which it passes into lower hot air manifold 34. Both the burner assembly ~~22/23/24/25~~^{22/23/24/25} and ~~122/123/124/125~~^{122/123/124/125} and the blower assemblies 29 and ~~129~~³⁰ may be independently controlled so that the temperature as well as the air pressure may be set to a preferred level for the product to be cooked.

Turning now to Figs. 3 and 6, the lower hot air manifold 34 feeds hot air into right and left hot air channels 38 and 39 which feed a lower air impingement nozzle assembly 19. Air under a relatively low pressure (one-half to ten pounds per square inch gauge) passes outwardly through upwardly directed holes 85 (see Fig. 3A) in the plates of the nozzle and impinges upon the food to be cooked. Hot air also passes outwardly through holes 88 in an angled plate 87 which directs hot air both downwardly and toward vent 83 down the oven chamber. Similarly, holes in nozzle assembly 18, fed by channels 35 and 36, urge hot air downwardly and forwardly to impinge the food and to help urge the gas flow down the oven chamber to the vent 83. This not only heats the food by conduction but also tends to remove any stagnant air and vapor layer which surrounds the food. Thus, the food is heated more efficiently and more quickly by the fact of the air impingement. It further carries with it the surrounding cooking vapor with its temperature and humidity so that the food is more quickly raised to the desired temperature. Since the food supporting belt 17 is largely open, the hot air passes readily through it and around all sides of the food to be cooked (which is indicated by reference character 41 in Fig. 6).

The surfaces of the cooking chamber are shown in Fig. 6 although the hood 42

1 has been raised therefrom. The upper wall of the cooking chambers indicated by
2 reference character 43 and the left side wall by 44 and the right side wall by 45. The
3 base portions 46 and 51 rest in the sealing lips 47 and 52 of the lower pan 61 when the
4 hood is lowered. The hood consisting of walls 43, 44 and 45 are held on a cross
5 member 53 which is, in turn, held by two vertical members 54 and 55. Members 54 and
6 55 are supported by rods 56 and 57. The hood is raised and lowered by a chain hoist 40
7 supported by frame 50. Rods 56 and 57 telescope into vertical members 54 and 55 so
8 that as hood 42 is lowered, the base 58 thereof rests upon the frame to create a dead air
9 space 60 above the upper surface and the side walls of the cooking chamber. The lower
10 pan of the cooking chamber is indicated by reference character 61 which provides a
11 conventional slanted grease or other liquid removing floor. It is important that the air
12 volume of the cooking chamber be relatively small so that only the air necessary for
13 cooking need be heated and the outer surface of the cooking chamber be minimized to
14 minimize radiation heat loss. Outer sides are, of course, provided along the entire length
15 of the oven to further reduce heat loss.

16 Returning now to Figs. 3 and 4, a steam nozzle assembly 62 is shown in side
17 view in Fig. 3 and in front view of Fig. 4. A steam line 63 is controlled by a steam
18 valve 64 shown in Fig. 2. This is independently controlled from steam valves 65 and 66
19 which provides the operator with additional temperature and moisture control. It is, of
20 course, understood that the term "steam" is intended to include a spray of water mist
21 which is quickly turned to steam in the high temperatures of the cooking chamber.
22 Returning to Fig. 3 steam nozzle assembly 62 emits an upper stream of steam 67 and a
23 lower stream of steam 68 through nozzles 20. Since the product to be cooked has just
24 passed through a high temperature color development and sealing operation, the streams
25 of steam 67 and 68 tend to extinguish any flareup that may occur. Also, it should be

1 noted that the streams 67 and 68 are directed toward the discharge end 12 of the oven
2 which helps move the cooking vapor 21 concurrently with respect to the food supporting
3 belt 17. A separate steam line 69 supplies a steam nozzle assembly 70 which also has a
4 pair of streams of steam 71 and 72. Steam nozzle assembly 70 is controlled by steam
5 valve 65 as are the other steam nozzle assemblies indicated by reference character 70 in
6 Fig. 2. Steam nozzle assemblies 73 shown in Fig. 2 are controlled by steam valve 66.

7 Turning now to the color development and sealing assembly, an upper color
8 development and sealing burner 74 (see Fig. 3) is fed with high pressure air and gas to
9 provide a flame 75 which heats the upper surface of food 41 to be cooked. This provides
10 coloring and sealing to the food. Similarly, a lower color development and sealing
11 burner 76 has a flame 77 which heats the lower surface of food product 41. The heat
12 from both the upper and lower flames 75 and 77 heat a branding wheel 78 which is
13 driven by a chain link belt 79 from a gear 80 which also contacts the continuous moving
14 belt 13. Branding wheel 78 is floating so that it will rise if necessary. Branding wheel
15 78 may also be permanently raised to eliminate any branding. The branding rods 81
16 always move at the same speed as a food supporting belt 17 to provide a neat brand on
17 the upper surface of food product 41. The lower side of the food product 41 is branded
18 by the moving belt 13, although belt 13 may be cooled to eliminate branding if desired.

19 Burners 74 and 76 may be aimed through a 90 degree arc. They may be aimed
20 horizontally toward the cooking chamber or at any angle between horizontally to directly
21 downwardly and upwardly respectively toward the moving belt 17. The choice of
22 direction depends on the amount of coloring and sealing desired and the type of food
23 being cooked. Thus the flames 75 and/or 77 may be aimed to directly impinge the
24 surfaces of the food to be cooked, or they may merely heat the surfaces depending on
25 how the burners 74 and 76 are aimed.

1 An important feature of the color development and sealing assembly is the aiming
2 of the flames 75 and 77 toward the opening of the cooking chamber and the conveying of
3 the heat from these flames into the cooking chamber. The portion of the cooking
4 chamber which surrounds the branding rods is in a stair stepped shape indicated by
5 reference character 82. The hot air is moved inwardly into the cooking chamber and not
6 exhausted in a separate vent. The hot air carries the entire length of the cooking
7 chamber and is not vented until it passes out of the cooking vapor vent 83 shown in Figs.
8 1 and 2. Also the upper color development and sealing burner and the lower color
9 development and sealing burner are independently controlled so that the proper amount of
10 heat may be applied depending on the product being cooked.

11 The construction of the upper and lower impingement manifolds is a very
12 important feature of the present invention. Fig. 3a shows the top of lower and upper air
13 impingement manifolds 19 and 18 where it can be seen that nozzle 19 has a nozzle plate
14 84 with a plurality of small holes 85 which causes the air to move out in small discrete
15 streams against the product to be cooked. There are no nozzles on the angled face 86 but
16 there are nozzles on the angled face 87 which are indicated by reference character 88.
17 Similarly upper air impingement manifold 18 has a nozzle plate 89 shown in Fig. 3 in
18 side view which also has a plurality of holes 90. An angled face 91 also has a plurality
19 of holes 92 but angled face 93 has no holes. This causes the air to be urged downwardly
20 and also at an approximately 45 degree angle in the direction of the discharge and to help
21 move the cooking vapors 21 along the oven. It is also evident in Fig. 3 that the upper
22 surface 43 of cooking chamber 16 is angled upwardly as indicated by reference character
23 94 to accommodate the air impingement manifolds as well as the steam manifolds. This
24 causes the internal volume of the cooking chamber to be minimized and helps to increase
25 the velocity of the cooking vapor 21 concurrently with the food supporting belts 17.

1 Also viewing Fig. 2 it is evident to see that with the multiple entries of hot air
2 and steam the volume of cooking vapors increases along the chamber so that as the food
3 becomes more cooked, the cooking vapor 21 increases in velocity.

4 Further details of construction of the steam nozzle assembly is shown in Fig. 4
5 where it can be seen that steam line 63 feeds a vertical steam line 95. This, in turn,
6 feeds an upper horizontal steam manifold 96 and a lower horizontal steam manifold 97.
7 Each of these manifolds have a plurality of individual nozzles 20 which urge the streams
8 of steam in the direction shown for instance, in Fig. 3 indicated by reference character 67
9 and 68.

10 Another important feature of the present invention is the single pass operation
11 where the only significant venting of cooking vapor is through cooking vapor vent 83
12 which includes a damper 99 and an air blower, not shown, positioned upwardly from
13 damper 99. Air is thus drawn upwardly through vent 83 and is exhausted and is not
14 recirculated.

15 As the food 41 passes along the cooking chamber, it tends to draw heat out of the
16 cooking vapors 21. Thus, although the temperature may be as high as 1000 to 1600
17 degrees Fahrenheit near the product feed end of the cooking chamber, it decreases along
18 the chamber. For example, it may drop to 800, 600, 400 and 300 degrees in some
19 instances, along the chamber so that as the food warms, the cooking temperature
20 difference between the product and the cooking vapors 21 decreases. This characteristic
21 optimizes the cooking operation and reduces the possibility of overcooking in a manner
22 not possible in the typical oven or a recirculating oven which remains at a relatively
23 constant temperature.

24 Also shown in Fig. 5 is a belt cleaning loop 100 which causes the belt to pass
25 through a tank 101 filled with water 102. It has been found that the belt remains

1 relatively clean during most cooking operations. If it is desired to add non-stick coatings
2 to the belt, they can be added to tank 102.

3 Control panel 103 is shown in Figs. 7 and 8. The cooking unit is provided with
4 numerous means for controlling temperature, air flow, humidity, and belt speed.

5 C Appropriate monitoring units such ^{as} pressure sensing means, thermocouples and other
6 sensors provide input to the control panel for facilitating the operation of the unit. The
7 controls are more specifically set forth in Fig. 8. Particular note is made of the wide
8 variety of controls available on both the upper impingement unit and the lower
9 impingement unit. The result is a highly versatile and yet efficient continuous
10 convection/impingement cooking oven which is capable of placing the optimum
11 temperature, time and humidity together with upper and lower air flow impingement on
12 the food to be cooked so that the best possible product will result.

13 The present embodiments of this invention are thus to be considered in all respects
14 as illustrative and not restrictive; the scope of the invention being indicated by the
15 appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes which come
16 within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are intended to be embraced
17 therein.